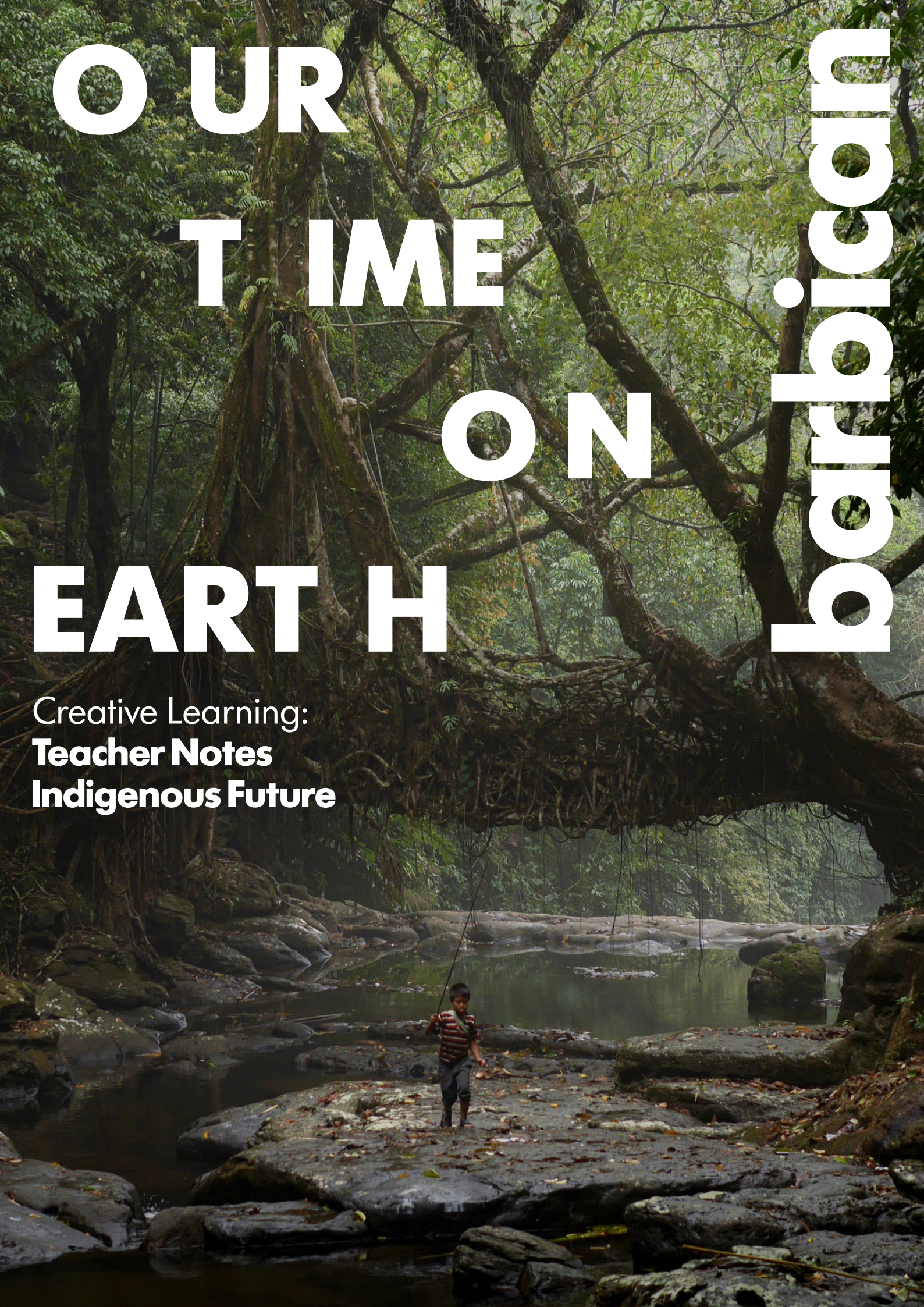


# OUR TIME ON EARTH

# Indigenous

Creative Learning:  
**Teacher Notes**  
**Indigenous Future**





## Plan Your Visit

*Our Time on Earth* runs from 5 May – 28 August at the Barbican Centre. The exhibition takes place in the Curve, Pit Theatre and foyer. School groups can book to come any time, and we have limited slots for tours and workshops on Tuesdays at 2pm and Thursdays at 10am from 10 May – 28 July.

Please also find our digital [Exhibition Guide](#) to support your teaching.

## Using this resource

This resource is for the classroom, and complements the exhibition *Our Time on Earth*, but you might use it even if you have not attended with your students.

Aimed at Key Stage 2 and 3.

### In here you will find...

- An introduction to the artworks Smi kra Wahikwa and Wild Arrow #7 by Choose Earth and Selvagem to be used as a provocation to begin a discussion
- Teacher notes on **climate change, colonial histories, indigenous cultures and invisible life forms.**
- Discussion points and questions
- New vocabulary
- Activities for analysing the source material (a short film and a written letter) and responding creatively to it
- Further links to resources, notes and activities to develop the session



"Life Forces" by Tim&Ed, 2021

## Curriculum Links

*Our Time on Earth* brings together indigenous thinkers, artists, scientists, activists, architects and more. Our resources reflect the interdisciplinary, collaborative ambition of the project, as we acknowledge the climate emergency affects every realm of life, and every subject on the curriculum. We aim to provide opportunities for teachers to engage students with climate action in a holistic way. Below is some guidance for where the subject matter links to the curriculum.

### Key Stage 2 and 3 History –

- a study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066
- a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history – one study chosen from: early Islamic civilisation, including a study of Baghdad c. AD 900; Mayan civilisation c. AD 900; Benin (West Africa) c. AD 900-1300
- ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901

### Key Stage 2 and 3 English –

- Reading (comprehension)
  - continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
  - identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing
  - drawing inferences such as deducing characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
  - summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas
  - identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning
  - discussing and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader
  - distinguishing between statements of fact and opinion
  - retrieving, record and present information from non-fiction
- Writing
  - write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information
  - understand and critically evaluate texts
  - make an informed personal response, recognising that other responses to a text are possible and evaluating these

### Key Stage 2 and 3 Science –

- Living things and their habitats
  - recognise that living things can be grouped in a variety of ways
  - explore and use classification keys to help group, identify and name a variety of living things in their local and wider environment
  - recognise that environments can change and that this can sometimes pose dangers to living things
  - describe how living things are classified into broad groups according to common observable characteristics and based on similarities and differences, including microorganisms, plants and animals
- Cells and their organization
  - cells as the fundamental unit of living organisms, including how to observe, interpret and record cell structure using a light microscope
- Relationships in an ecosystem
  - the interdependence of organisms in an ecosystem, including food webs and insect pollinated crops

### Key stage 2 and 3 Art –

- to improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials [for example, pencil, charcoal, paint, clay]

### Key Stage 2 and 3 Geography –

- physical geography, including: climate zones, biomes and vegetation belts, rivers, mountains, volcanoes and earthquakes, and the water cycle
- human geography, including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links, and the distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water
- population and urbanisation, international development, economic activity in the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors; and the use of natural resources
- understand how human and physical processes interact to influence and change landscapes, environments and the climate; and how human activity relies on effective functioning of natural systems

### Key Stage 2 and 3 Citizenship –

- to realise the consequences of anti-social and aggressive behaviours, such as bullying and racism, on individuals and communities
- to explore how the media present information
- to recognise and challenge stereotypes
- to learn that differences and similarities between people arise from a number of factors, including cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity, gender and disability
- recognise diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding



Courtesy of Choose Earth

## The Future is Indigenous – Choose Earth and Selvagem

Choose Earth and Selvagem are Brazilian-based collectives fighting for the future of our planet. Choose Earth are a campaign that explore indigenous strategies for fighting climate change, working with 64 indigenous leaders to support their collective resistance to the destruction of their land, which is their life. They are an innovative storytelling and fundraising project, amplifying indigenous creativity and intelligence as a vehicle for change. It is a collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous activists and communicators, using multimedia storytelling to support Brazilian indigenous communities' fight for social and environmental justice. By resourcing a network of frontline defenders who put themselves at risk to preserve life for all, we are ensuring our own survival. Included in *Our Time on Earth* is their letter to the west "We are the Earth" and features in Activity 1.

Find out more about their work [here](#).

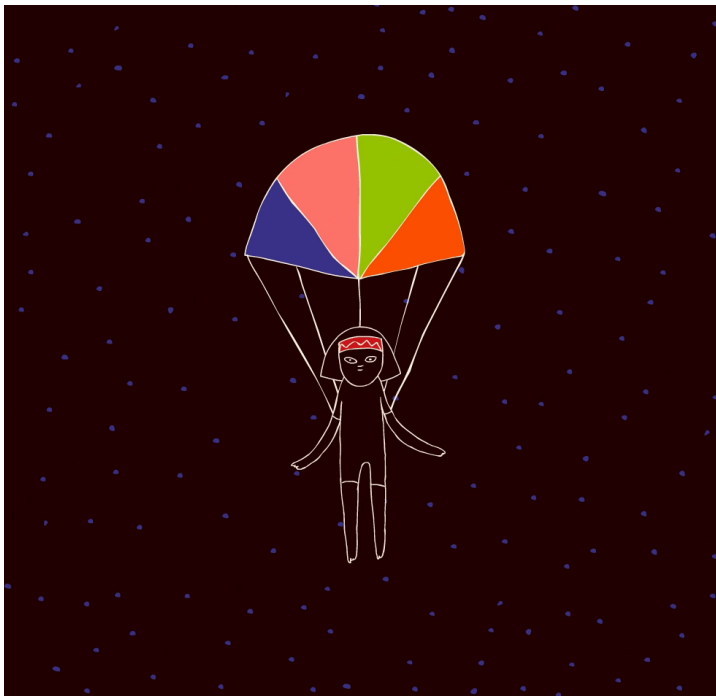


Artwork by Livia Serri Francoio

Selvagem (meaning "wild") is a study of life on earth idealised by Anna Dantes and Ailton Krenak. It is an educational community made to shed light on the connections between knowledge deriving from different sources (indigenous, scientific, artistic, ancestral etc). They have created documentaries, talks, books and activities to share and collaborate across cultures - all available with a link at the end of this resource.

The seventh film in their "Flecha" series is screened for the first time in the exhibition. Flechas Selvagem (Wild Arrows) make ancestral, scientific, artistic and mythological knowledge co-exist. "A project to postpone the end of the world with beautiful words", Selvagem produce their films with images and knowledge from different sources. They believe that the world has enough information in it, and we must appreciate it before generating any more.

Find out more about their work [here](#).



Artwork by Livia Serri Franco

This work was made by indigenous artists in Brazil. It might be worth exploring the meaning of “indigenous” with your group, whilst emphasising the global and local perspectives essential to the word.

Whilst the word “indigenous” refers to different groups of people across the globe who are the original inhabitants of territories, there are vast differences between the practices, ethnicities and beliefs of these groups, who are intertwined with the land they came from. Inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures that are passed down from ancestors, they have kept ways of living that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live, that have settled or colonised more recently.

Despite cultural differences, indigenous people share common problems related to the protection of their rights, resources, lands and way of life. Indigenous peoples have been under threat since modern colonialism began in the 15th century.

Encourage the class to make links between this history and anything they have learnt in history already, for example, relating to the British Empire.. How does thinking from an indigenous perspective disrupt historical narratives?

Although the indigenous people represent just 5% of the world’s population, they are responsible for the protection of 82% of the world’s biodiversity, through ways of life, campaigns and knowledge of the earth.

## Indigenous Knowledge:

### Do

**Define the concepts of indigenous, traditional ecological knowledge and colonialism with the class**

**Indigenous** – Refers to different groups of people across the globe who are the original inhabitants of territories. There are vast differences between the practices, ethnicities and beliefs of these groups, who are intertwined with the land they came from

**Colonialism** – Colonialism is a practice or policy of control by one people or power over other people or areas, often by establishing colonies and generally with the aim of economic dominance

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge** – Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) describes indigenous and other forms of traditional knowledge regarding the sustainability of local resources

Use the quote from the Letter to the West and the image of the floating island homes of the Ma'dan people in Iraq to discuss [more notes on this here](#).

These issues discussed so far are continuing to endanger fragile and vital alliances between people and the living world.



Courtesy of Julia Watson

## Ask

**How can we reconnect to planet Earth?**

**How can we learn from and celebrate the human societies that exist already in deep connection with the natural world?**

**What does collaboration, connection and collectivity look like at a local scale. What about global?**

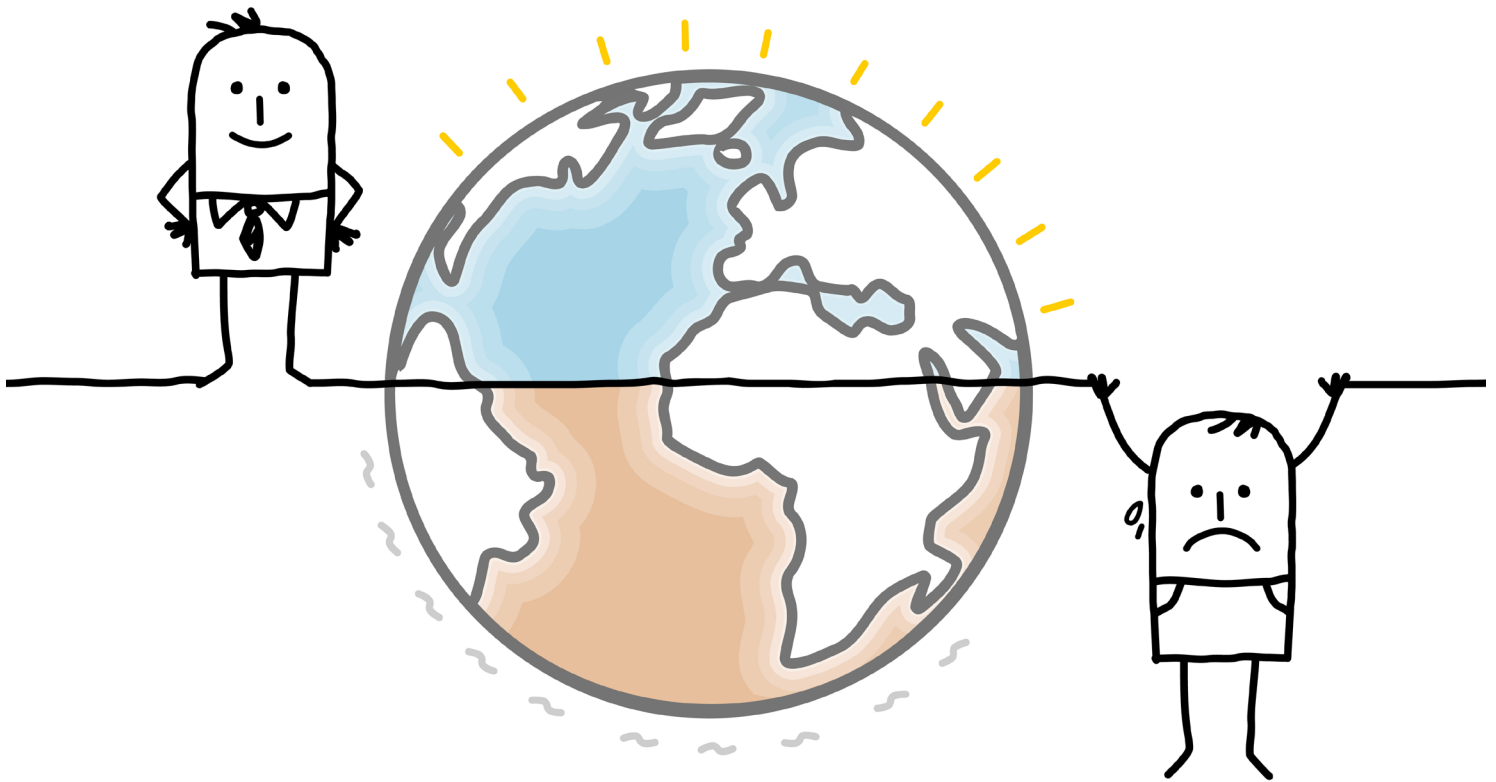
**Tip:** This knowledge exists today, it is not something of the past or far away lands. Where possible, avoid romanticizing these cultures. There are indigenous people in London, many involved with campaigns to change the fate of these communities. At the same time, many of these groups are currently campaigning on the front lines to protect land from multinational companies and governments for whom land is seen as only an economic resource. As a result, these contemporary communities and indigenous activists are facing violence, and often death.

## Discuss

**Talk about Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a concept. Think as a class about the different reasons why it might be important to protect cultural knowledge.**

**Challenge:** What might be the barriers to protecting these cultures?

**Tip:** Many indigenous cultures are not represented by any nation due to having different ideas about land, territory, borders or having been displaced. This means most are not represented at the UN, rendering the global governance around human and land rights, and sustainability, exclusive to these communities.



## Ask

**How does the impact of climate change look in the place where you live?**

**Where is there more pollution in the city? Where is the green space? Do you feel connected to wildlife? Have you noticed any adverse weather? Is this something you see happening in the future rather than right now?**

At the same time as surviving the exploitation of their labour, knowledge and land throughout history and today, these groups are some of the most harshly affected by the consequences of climate change. While countries like the UK in the "Global North" who are not yet as affected by climate change and are generally the biggest polluters and the drivers of urban expansion, communities in the "Global South" have been suffering for decades.

## Do

**List examples of the effects of climate change you have heard in the news**

**What do you think might be missing from the news?**

Encourage the students to make a link between local and global issues. Are there any examples in their neighborhood of similar issues around unequal effects of climate change, or the exploitation or colonisation of space or resources? You might mention "gentrification" as an example of this. As a further activity you could explore different news sources and try and spot the overlapping issues related to climate injustice.



Courtesy of Choose Earth

## What's in a name?

The indigenous groups involved with Choose Earth in Brazil: the Apurinã, Arara-Karô, Asurini, Baré, Fulni-ô, Guajajara, Guarani-Mbyá, Guarani-Kaiowá, Kaingang, Katukina, Kokama, Krahô, Kayapó, Manchineri, Marubo, Maxakali, Munduruku, Mura, Nambikwara, Pataxó, Pankararu, Sateré-Mawé, Shanenawa, Tapeba, Taupang, Terena, Ticuna, Tupari, Tupinambá, Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau, Xacriabá, Xavante, Xerente, Waiãpi, Witoto.

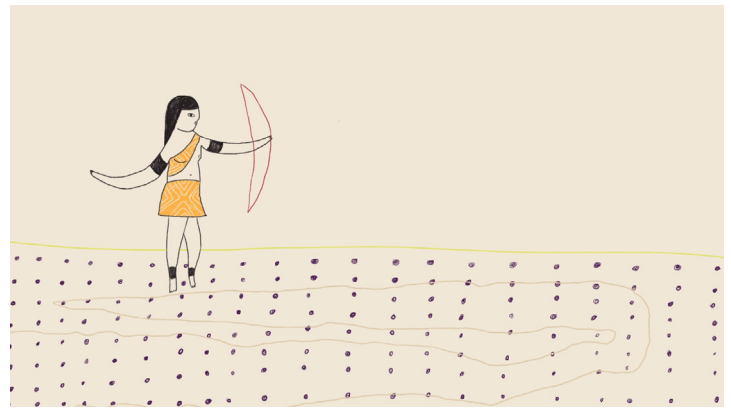
"Native American, Inuit, First Nation and Aboriginal" are all broad names of indigenous groups from across the world. A common word for indigenous groups in the Americas is "Indian". Why? In fact, this word originated with Christopher Columbus, the Italian sailor who thought he had arrived in India on his ship when he first visited the Caribbean in 1492. The islands where he landed are still named the "West Indies", even though they are half way across the world from India.

Why are names for things important? Why is it important who gets to choose a name? Look at the list of names mentioned earlier. What can we learn from names?

Colombus' voyage opened a path to colonial expansion across the world, with many European settlers arriving with devastating consequences for local people: extracting resources, bringing disease, killing citizens and taking land to build farms and settlements.

Many people have named this event a "discovery", whilst indigenous people call this an "invasion". What's the difference, and why might it matter? Use the resources at the end of this document to further explore this difference.





Artwork by Livia Serri Franco

## We are the Earth by Sônia Guajajara and Célia Xakriabá in collaboration with Earthrise (extract)

We are the Earth. We arise from the Earth and we return to it. The Earth is within us. The Earth is our sister, our daughter, our aunt, our mother, our grandmother. The earth is our womb, our food, our cure. The power of our chants connects us to the charms of our ancestors. We are the ones who – through our hearts - hear the cry of the Earth. In the echo of this cry, the daughters and sons of the Earth cry too. We are the ones who no longer wish to remain deaf. Nor in silence.

The earth is our collective home and our inner home. It is our breath and the heart that pulsates within us. If the earth becomes ill, humanity will end. The earth is the guardian of science, the oldest, wisest teacher.

We Indigenous peoples continue to learn much more from the living tree than from dead paper.

When we are asked if we are afraid to put our bodies forward to defend our mother earth, we answer: “what we are afraid of is the social numbness that normalizes the innumerable attacks on territories”. The land has children, it has families, it has caretakers. The land has a voice.

For this reason, we invite humanity to join forces in this collective task of making a commitment to heal the land. There is still time. Fighting for the demarcation of Indigenous territories is the way to guarantee life and breath of all humanity.

There is time to reforest our minds. To promote a broad engagement against the expropriation of our territories and our peoples. A revolution in the way we live and understand the world; a revolution from the perspective of the Indigenous mother who resists, cares, heals and protects us.

Reforesting minds is a life plan: through reforesting our thoughts, and decolonising the land, we hold the possibility of healing the colonial traumas within the landscape of our bodies. Our struggle is not only to reforest: our struggle is mainly stop deforestation. Our struggle is not only to heal: our struggle is mainly to not get sick.

Reforesting minds is a profound cry for a new relationship with nature. Founded in Indigenous cosmovisions, that drink in the complexity of the interactions between all that is alive, it manifests itself from our ancestry.

Smi kra Wahikwa, “The future is ancestral”, as we say in the Xakriabá language.

To save the old is to save the new. You cannot cure evil if you insist on the innocuous remedy. There is no other way to save the forests, the voice of the Indigenous songs, Indigenous life itself, if not by the force of the fight.

Who are we? We are the cure, the active principle, the air that saves you. We are daughters and sons of ancestors who taught us “that the limit of a land is in our consciousness”.

When we learn from the land, it is a book that never ends. Hail our original peoples. The lungs of the world are Indigenous.

Read the extract and complete the below.

### Do

**Underline new facts or details learned in the letter.**

**Underline anything not understood.**

**Underline anything that feels like poetry.**

**Underline clear messages.**

**Underline metaphors used to describe nature.**

**Underline metaphors used to describe themselves.**

### Ask

**Who is the audience?**

**What is the overall message?**

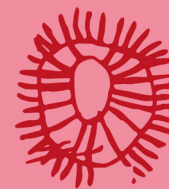
**What does it make you think of?**

**What might this tell you about the writers and their culture?**

### Respond

**Draw a picture inspired by the phrase “reforest our minds”.**

**Zoom in to another line that you find particularly striking. Sketch images that come to mind as you think of the phrase.**



## Invisible Arrow

Life on Earth depends on billions and billions of things we cannot see that exist around us and inside us. Microbes. They are all over our bodies, in our food, in our soil, in our air. These include bacteria, fungi and protozoa. These are the smallest living things on Earth. COVID-19 is a microbe, but not all of them are harmful. We need certain microbes in a healthy, balanced ecosystem that is constantly transforming, we need the invisible realm to survive.

Indigenous people continue to connect to this invisible realm through artistic, cultural and medicinal practices. Scientists, however, connect to them with microscopes, making them visible to the human eye. In this film about invisible life, Selvagem invites these different forms of knowledge to exist side by side in the story of invisible beings on planet earth.

Watch the film [here](#), as part of Flecha Selvagem – Wild Arrow series. You can find [further notes on the film](#) here in English. Use these questions to lead a cross-discipline enquiry of the film.

## Ask (to complete while watching)

1. According to the narrator in the film, why is the earth full of mystery and splendour?
2. In what ways do invisible creatures keep the biosphere alive?
3. Identify 3 people mentioned in the film who can see into the invisible dimension
4. Why is a bobtail squid an example of “symbiosis”?
5. Where does the smell of rain come from?

## Respond

**Draw a grid with 9 boxes on A4 paper. Make a storyboard with colour, shape and symbols to recreate your journey through the film. These are 9 snapshots you want to recreate in the film. Think about the contrasting styles. Think about your choices of images. What made you choose them?**

## Learn

1. Why does the narrator say that the microorganisms are our grandmothers?
2. How do fungi and microbes “continuously transform” the forest?
3. According to this film, is a human being an individual, or a complex community?
4. How is the planet a “body that thinks and dances” rather than a “house”?
5. How did microorganisms give us oxygen?
6. The human body can be called a “microbiome”, while a forest can be called a “biome”. What’s the connection?

## Create

**Write a poem that starts with, or is inspired by, this statement:**

***Everything we see is an expression of the invisible.***

***Activated by the sun, life unfolds in the invisible forming its wild web.***

Tips:

What metaphors can you use? Look at the metaphors in the Letter to the West and in the film. Do any of them inspire you?

Repetition is often used in poetry to create a sense of rhythm, force, and evoke a structure of feeling. Can you find examples in the Letter? How might you use repetition? Is there a particular phrase or sentence you want to stand out?



## Further resources:

[Choose Earth](#)

[Selvagem](#)

and the whole [Flecha film series](#) with notes in english.

[It's Happening Now](#) – a column by gal-dem magazine

[Christopher Columbus](#) (article)

[Wretched of the Earth](#)

## Can I Live?

By Fehinti Balogun

Produced by Complicité

A new online performance about the climate emergency. With rap, theatre and animation, Fehinti links the climate crisis & social justice, finding hope, through activism, for the future.

Catch the Trailer of the film [here](#)

If you want to discover more about the ecological emergency, climate justice and the creatives behind this filmed performance download the digital resource pack [here](#).

To screen the film at your school contact [creativeengagement@complicite.org](mailto:creativeengagement@complicite.org)

## Credits

These Learning Resources were created by Hannah Calascione for Barbican Creative Learning, with ethical consultation from Angela Chan, Angela Camacho and Sarah Melia.

